

Three Black Bass at a Crack—And That's Not All

By Robert H. Davis
Editor of *Mansey's Magazine*

UNLESS you are interested in waters where black bass can be taken on flies three at a crack and on plugs in pairs, you had better pass up this article. You must come to this contribution with an open mind, free, untrammelled and unswayed by narrow prejudice. I have no stomach for any one who doubts me in advance.

Now get this:
At 12:15 on July 20th I stepped off a Canadian Pacific train at East Templeton, Templeton Township, Ottawa County, Canada, accompanied by Frank L. Packard (author of "The Miracle Man"), an ample equipment of fishing tackle, two pump-line packs and a light heart.

A solitary citizen standing on the platform in his shirt-sleeves walked over and extended his hand to the novelist. I was introduced to a Mr. L. K. McLaurin, a grizzled, sunburned mountain man who was the soul of hospitality. I don't know that I ever met one more agreeable from the go-off.

He rounded our junk up with a practiced hand and announced that lunch was ready at a small French hotel 200 yards from the depot.

"Have you heard anything from the lakes?" asked Packard.

"I have," said McLaurin. "MacGowan telephoned in that the bass are taking the fly three at a crack in Grand Lake, and the speckled trout in Barnes run from five to seven pounds."

That's exactly what he said! I looked at him rather sharply.

Poor Luck For Nimrods

"All up and down in those waters in front of Percy's house the lake trout are slamming the minnows to beat the Dutch. We might be able to hook a few redspots in Green Lake, and, if we're lucky, a couple of landlocked salmon. Do you care about fishing, Mr. Davis?"

"That's a fine question to ask a man who is choking to death," I replied. I never heard anybody reel off fish bunk like McLaurin.

"Well, we'll give you a run for your money. How long do you expect to stay up?"

I ventured to remark that if the fishing was as good as his rambling talk indicated a couple of hours would be enough for me.

A pained expression flitted across Packard's face. Apparently he observed a note of incredulity in my voice.

"Well, we had lunch at the French inn, a temperance pension, after which we piled our duffie into a two-seater and hit the road behind a team of draft horses. For the first five miles I had very little to say. That three-at-a-crack brag of McLaurin's was quite a stiff punch from a total stranger.

When we breasted the first hill I made bold to inquire for further particulars, and by the time we got into the Laurentian Mountains, about ten miles from East Templeton, the novelist and the bushman had my angora by the whiskers for a fare-well.

At 4 o'clock we dropped into a valley through which crept the lower arm of Lake McGregor. A friendly voice echoed up to us, and one Jim McGowan, who afterward turned out to be a banker, stood up in a motorboat and gave a long yell.

Packard cupped his hands. "How are the bass biting, Jim?"

"Three at a crack," came back the response, echoing and reechoing from shore to shore.

"Didn't we tell you?" exclaimed the two worthies who had brought me up the line.

"And the speckled trout?" yelled McLaurin, not content with the previous talk.

"Oh, four, five, six, seven pounds. All you want of 'em."

"What destiny had brought me into this community of liars?"

Into the Motorboat

We tumbled out of the two-seater and stowed ourselves in MacGowan's boat. The first turn of the engine she put her spark and we were on the wing.

In a half hour's time we were at MacGowan's cabin, where we shifted our store clothes and climbed into the indescribable apparel which tramps, drunks and fishermen prefer to pumpkins and fisherman's traps.

"And the line line."

"Again we boarded the lugger and dashed north by northwest, stopping at the wharf of the Blackburn Mica Mine, where we took on a couple hundred pounds of grub. Off again."

At about 6 o'clock we hove to in a beautiful cove, on the shores of which nestled a rambling farmhouse with a wide veranda. Altogether it was a balmy institution.

A bald-headed party with canary colored eyebrows and a fringe of pink hair bristling above his ears rounded down the path to meet us. He was dressed in the fatigues of a soldier, hickory shirt and policeman's suspenders. Town was in his eye.

"Youth that even his bald and glistening dome could not eliminate. Where are you fellows going?" he asked.

"Fishing," said MacGowan, throwing a line.

"When?"

"Right now."

"Where?" inquired the hairless one. "Grand Lake, you lobster!" exploded McLaurin.

"Well, you can bet your socks I'm fishing with you!" chorried the bronze beauty, the meanwhile yanking duffie and began slapping one another on the back.

"Up, Bob," said Packard; "I want

you to meet Percy Hamilton. He is going to guide us."

In about ten minutes he had a team hitched up and was rushing around the place like a howling dervish, loading canoes, packbags, fishing tackle and tents into a farm wagon. He tore into Mrs. Hamilton's kitchen, grabbed all the bread he could find, ten pounds of the best creamery butter, half a cheese and all the preserves he could carry. I never before saw an unprepared man get into such magnificent action.

At six-thirty we were on the road again, crossing the hill between McGregor and Grand Lakes, a distance of a quarter of a mile.

"I'm glad you fellows showed up," said Percy. "The d—d farm was beginning to get on my nerves. To h—l with the hay! Nix on the potatoes! Raus mit the corn! No man could get through the summer without a couple of weeks' fishing at a camp in the brush. And say, boys, the bass are taking the flies three at a crack."

Who Was The Liar?

There it was again! Was this enthusiastic devotee of the gentle art of angling also a liar? We shall see.

Thus it came about that Percy Hamilton became the guide of the party.

I didn't like the name "Percy Hamilton" at all. He looked very much as though the cognomen of "Larry Lawrence" would fit him better, and hereafter I shall call him "Larry."

At seven o'clock we slipped our canoes into Grand Lake, haven of all havens, and paddled to the north end without a stop. The thick shadows of evening had begun to fall when we docked in a distant cove near a ridge which divides Grand from Green Lake.

A sheet of water that is kin to Killarney. We pitched our tents on the high-point between, taking shelter in some scrub pine and hemlock, through which the night winds breezed a perpetual lullaby. The evening star, in a deep blue sky, twinkled a welcome. A fair moon, cold and remote, hung in the opal east.

We piled the axe to the timber, gathered our fagots and hung the pot. Larry stoned his fire like a true disciple of the open, and presently the perfume of bacon and the aroma of coffee permeated the periphery. We gorged like men, each unfolding a separate tale of hope for the morrow.

A billion stars tumbled into the zenith, splashed down the sides of the purpling dome above us and spangled the horizon. God was in His heaven; all was right with the world.

From the bald peaks of the aged Laurentians, oldest geological formation on the Western Hemisphere, stark-naked trees, gnarled by time, thrust their twisted forms into the gloom. A faint glow in the west paled into sombre tones, darkened and died in a sea of velvet.

It seemed as though our voices were the last in the world, our speech rising through the trees into the engulfing night. The laughter was tumbled back and forth from lake to lake. A hush in the conversation heralded the birth of indescribable silence.

Then McLaurin pulled out a corn-cob pipe, tamped it full of shag tobacco and put the place on the bum!

Shag, for the benefit of the untutored,

people last November, which confidence related in nowise to the treaty of peace but rather to the problems of reconstruction.

A proper non-partisan exposé of war blunders, in order to clarify and prepare for a solid building for the future, is justified. This, however, should not be in the spirit of capricious criticism, because blunders were unavoidable in assuming the tremendous responsibilities of the last few years, but where such blunders are interfering with a proper peace-time development and where they are indicative of the incapacity of departmental administration they, of course, must be exposed and immediately corrected. But where the Republican party is expected to function, and can function, is not alone in calling attention to the blunders of others but in putting into effect—immediate effect—the remedy for domestic problems and in constructing a solid business government.

Again, accepting the mandate of the American people, a reorganization of the great Federal machine is demanded, in order that it be responsive to the demands of the times, and that obvious waste and extravagance, burdening all classes of our citizenship, be eliminated. The Republican party should adopt as its slogan "Constructive domestic readjustment," which means, in effect, that the Federal government shall be organized as a business organization, with a budget and complete supervision of expenditures, with a revision of the method of securing income and a complete "turning of the light" on departmental extravagances. In modelling a government along these lines of successful private business confidence will be restored, stabilization of industrial conditions will follow and the country will the more quickly return to a pre-war basis.

Washington to-day is burdened with boards, commissions and departments. It has been said that there are more than five hundred separate organizations and many sub-organizations of the five hundred, and that the relation between them is so vague and indefinite that there is virtually no cooperation. Business stands still, not knowing which way to turn, before the uncertainty of their fickle and contradictory "policies." The overlapping process, which is not only

expensive and burdensome, but ineffective from the standpoint of results, was never better illustrated than during the war, when a National Council of Defense and various departments and commissions were attempting to do one and the same thing at the same time. It is going to be very difficult to dissociate many of these officials from their positions. The weeding out, concentrating process is unpopular, especially with the jobholder. The only way to rebuild the structure in Washington is to follow, without fear or favor, the policy adopted in some of the states recently, of providing legislation which will, at one swoop, consolidate and combine numerous boards and commissions into a centralized authority, which centralized authority must be responsible to the head of the government. And in this regard may I impersonally direct attention to the example in New Jersey?

It is absurd to assume that any Congress, whatever its political complexion, can pass upon appropriation bills running into the billions of dollars with any direct knowledge of whether they are economical or wasteful, whether they are justified or not. The inability of the government to function successfully during war times as well as times of peace should be the final note which will definitely assure the adoption of this business system.

The time has come for reorganization. The possibilities of such a system could be elaborated on without limit. It gives absolutely no improper concentration of power, as Congress, under the Constitution, is the final arbiter. It permits the President to be the executive inspiration and, where important matters of policy and consolidation are under contemplation, to sit as the head of the budget board and himself become acquainted, as he should be, with the activities of the government he is sworn to administer.

It will readily be seen, by investigation of what has been accomplished in smaller governmental units, that by adopting this policy without fear or favor, eliminating and consolidating boards and commissions, the actual saving in expenses, not to speak of the great advantage in proper functioning and administration, will reduce, right from the start, the expense of the government so materially that the public will ask why it has been so long neglected. And the answer will be easily forthcoming. Simply because no one with positive force and determination insisted upon this organization. The actual money that can be saved will pay interest on every war debt that the nation has negotiated.

We have laid much stress here on the actual saving of money, but just as important, and in fact more so, is the

Co-operation, Not Competition

The President of the United States, in association with the other executive departments and constitutional branches of the government, should be the executive directing head of the great business of the government, which has such wonderful opportunity to cooperate, rather than to compete, with individual initiative and enterprise. The Congress should be the board of directors, elected to represent every section of the country and to legislate both necessary types of regulation and helpful policies of cooperation. The various boards and commissions should be coordinated and combined, the purely superfluous ones being eliminated entirely. The billions of dollars appropriated for these activities should be appropriated through the common sense method of a budget; which, in a few words, means a budget commission, equipped with able scientific investigators and financiers, continuous in operation, carefully considering the needs and activities of each department, quickly recognizing where one overlaps the other and, in fact, providing the only opportunity to prevent such overlapping by beneficial comparisons.

A business system of financing government means saving—no waste. Absence of waste is economy. Economy in government is a minimum of expense

with a maximum of service, which, of course, is the equivalent of reasonable taxation. And lower taxation means a better wage and improved living conditions. It is difficult for people to share profits with those who are working for them when they have to give all their earnings to the government in the form of excess taxes and income taxes. With government properly run the burden of taxation would be reduced, leaving more to be distributed among the workers.

It is a smashing hour for both of us. Mac knew his bass tackle from every angle. He was a born caster, patient and skillful.

A light wind had begun to play upon

have it. The fever was upon me. I was battling with a trio of demons. A wild yell from the other shore split the morning air. "Three at a crack," MacGowan was at them, too. I had no time, however, to applaud his prowess. I had my hands full.

"For God's sake," said Larry, choking with emotion, "you've got to land those fish. Don't let MacGowan beat you to it."

Evidently Packard was some canoeist, as I observed when Larry brought our canoe around so that I could see the banker and the novelist at play.

I took me fifteen minutes to turn the trick. The total weight of those fish was four and three-quarter pounds. Even so, I was doomed to the low record. MacGowan's three were five plus.

I cast and recast, taking one and two fish repeatedly, and finally, from motives of pure sport, I eliminated two fish. MacGowan had two flies stripped once and landed a three and a half pound fish on the remaining Dungs-hill.

It was a smashing hour for both of us. Mac knew his bass tackle from every angle. He was a born caster, patient and skillful.

The Story of An Intrepid New Yorker Who Went Forth to Angle With a Novelist, a Banker, a Bushman, and the Owner of a Mica Mine

is a combination stench that suggests a smouldering hair mattress that has caught fire in the livestock sheds of a state fair. During the Tai-Ping rebellion in China, when the stinkpots were introduced as a phase of warfare, shag tobacco was in its infancy. But in later years it came into its own and has since established a record for putrescence that is without a peer in the history of odors. McLaurin, through persistent endeavor, an unconquerable will and inexhaustible patience, had learned to inhale it.

What some of us that night mistook for sleep was, in reality, asphyxiation.

On the morning of July 21 Larry, with a herculean effort, emerged from his coma, and by throwing buckets of cold water in the faces of his swooning comrades revived us one at a time. Packard, being a sensitive man and somewhat delicate, owing to the pursuit of literature, did not recover consciousness until after breakfast. Upon discovering that he had missed a meal, he again lapsed into a state of insensibility. A hasty conference was held after the novelist was brought around, and four desperate men notified McLaurin that thereafter, so far as we were concerned, there was an embargo on shag in Canada.

Now for the Story

Having reached this point without any actual fatalities, we will now go forth with an angle and fish.

We put the camp in shipshape, hung out our blankets to fumigate and made for the canoes. The novelist and the banker, with a full book of flies, took the west shore. Larry and I took the east. McLaurin took a nap on shore.

Grand Lake, at the point where we began to fish, was a quarter of a mile wide and ran into an arm toward the north which was thickly populated with lily-pads.

"You had better rig up with a Dungs-hill, a Rotal coachman and a Brown Hackle," advised Larry. "and start to cast when we get up by those rocks and lily-pads on the right. Take 'em easy, now. A short cast will get 'em. Here we are. There's an idle (ideal) place!"

I stripped a few feet and dropped the flies gently. No response.

"A little closer in there. Fan it a couple of times."

I had forty feet of line out. On the fourth cast a swirl parted the leaves, but nothing struck. I let ten feet more go. The trio fell like three autumn leaves. With a quick recovery I picked the end fly from the surface of the pool and flicked it.

Bang! Smash! I struck. Two small-mouth black bass got the steel. Both breasted the air at once.

"I'll hold 'er!" yelled Larry, swinging the point of the canoe off to the left. "Now give 'em line. Let 'em take it down. You'll get another one on that third fly."

Such good fortune was not to come

to me then. I landed the pair. One weighed two pounds, the other a pound and a half, scant. They were deep green fish, with clean, white bellies, nurtured in water clear as crystal.

I cast again. A lunker rushed it. I struck too soon and only pricked him. Plunged. He came out of the water, turned a back somersault and fled for the open.

"Shoot one over there." The morning sun glistened on Larry's bald head and a wild light danced from his eyes. He was a master at the paddle. The canoe crept down the shore like a ghost. "Now right off the point."

A gentle wind rounded the corner. "Sling it in the riffle."

I got a long one out. A big bass smashed the tail fly before it hit the water. I struck him hard. He went under, describing a wide arc to the right. Zing! Ping! Two bass came out; but it was plain from the angle of the line that a third fish had hit for keeps.

"Three at a crack!" from Larry. "Three at a crack!" from me.

With a dexterity born of long experience Larry backed away. "Give 'em all the line you've got." I let them



Mr. Davis, with double catch

the water and our canoes were drawn together as we came into the apex of the pond. Within sixty feet of one another we had strike after strike, the fish running from a pound to three and one-half pounds, and in both boats we had repeated records of three at a crack.

Could such things be, the last week in July? Believe me, they could.

I was warm with the activities of battle.

"I'll put her nose on the shore," said Larry, "and we'll have a smoke." Eleven bass lay in our canoe. MacGowan had fourteen. I uttered a silent prayer of thankfulness. Larry puffed at his pipe. "It's an idle spot, ain't it?"

"Yes, Larry, it's the gateway to heaven," I murmured. There are times when speech is superfluous.

The shade of a vast blue birch gave us sanctuary. MacGowan and Packard drifted in beside us. Mac's face was flushed with victory. In the softest possible voice Packard leaned over and said to me: "How about it, Patsy?"

"Would either of you gentlemen like to buy a mica mine?" The voice seemed quite apart from us. I looked at Packard and MacGowan. Neither of them had spoken. Then I looked at Larry. He was leaning on his paddle, which rested on the thwart. The voice was his. "Because if you do, I'll let you in."

I didn't quite get the drift at first. "I know a man in Pawris (Paris) who would take all the mica you could ship to him."

Larry was astride his hobby. "Nobody knows where this mine is but me. It's in an idle spot and it's got the best mica you ever saw; two be four, three be four, five be four. It's amber-colored. Some of it's pink. It's all up there waiting to be sacked. I thumb-trimmed it myself."

"What do you mean by 'thumb-trimmed,' Larry?" I asked.

"Well, when you take it out of the ledge you break off the rotten pieces with your thumb and what's left is the two be four, the three be four and the five be four. That means inches." He teetered forward on his paddle and then straightened up again.

"Look at that bass jump over there!" He jabbed his paddle into the water, slid the nose of the canoe from the beach and was again on the trail of the bass. His mining hobby was forgotten.

I watched Packard during the conversation and I believe he picked up some material for his next novel.

We went to casting again and remained on the water until the sun beat too fiercely upon us. It was a glorious day. By 10 o'clock we were back to camp again, after having returned the smaller fish to the water, retaining only enough for food.

Concerning The Heat

So far as the heat of the day is concerned, it is apropos that I set forth

here a little information on the important pastime of shooting the bottle. The game is as old as the hills in Canadian waters, but I had never before seen it played.

Larry was the case-keeper. His paraphernalia consisted of a quart wine bottle, around which he had laced a coarse net of light clothes-line. On the base of the net he had woven a four-pound lead weight, upon which the bottle rested firmly and upright.

Seventy-five feet of free rope ran away from the bottle, and the plug could be yanked out with a quick jerk, thus permitting the bottle to fall.

At a depth of sixty feet lake water holds about 30 degrees Fahrenheit and has got any soda-water fountain on earth whipped to a stiff, coagulated froth. The bottle always came up frosted and cold as an iceberg. The water was as clear as crystal and absolutely pure.

As a betting proposition, bottle-shooting is par excellence. All bets are placed as to where the bubbles will come up. The displacement of the plug permits the air to escape while the fresh water rushes in. Presently a thousand liquid pearls burst upon the surface. If a sperm whale had come up and blown beside us it would have given us little excitement.

Larry seemed to know just where the bubbles would appear and picked up a little loose change the first day, after which we bet him bubbles against bubbles and paid our losses in wind.

"I learned this bottle-shooting trick from a mica miner," ventured Larry, one high, hot noon, in order to turn the conversation back to a topic that lay close to his heart. Just then a loon, flying overhead, burst into loud laughter and the purchase of a mica mine was postponed.

We will now step into the bait-casting finals, for which I am always prepared. I had three four and a half foot rods—single-stickers—and a full line of Jim Heddon overwater and underwater baits.

A Born Izaak Walton

In various coves and along sunken reefs and in sandbars Larry's father-in-law had set stakes to mark certain spots in fishing ground. He was a wizard in this particular, and, although a still-fisherman, he seldom planted a buoy in more than ten feet of water.

"He's a grand basser," said Larry, "and never misses a day when the season is on. If he would put as much time in mica mining as he has in horn-bass out of Grand Lake, he would be the richest man in the world. One day we were eating lunch on the shores of Dam Lake when all of a sudden I see some mica sticking out of the ground—some three be four—"

I slipped a pebble at Frank Packard and got his eye. He rose deliberately, yawned and sauntered toward the canoe. The novelist was a man of few words, but many expressive gestures. "Goodby, Larry!"

I followed the scribe and we made a tour of the bass stakes, around all of which we cast with red underwater plugs. We took two, three and four fish at each stake. They generally struck on the first half dozen casts.

These bass ran from three to five pounds and the trick could be turned every morning and every night with absolute certainty. They seldom bit on flies at these points, but the underwater baits worked with gratifying regularity.

Our party returned at least five hundred bass to the waters of Grand Lake during the ten days we were there. We took all our fish on either flies or plugs. None of us cared for trolleys, hence that antiquated method for luring bass was canned completely.

On the morning of the fifth day Inspector McLaurin rolled out of his blanket and announced that he was going to cook some beans, bushy style. He won the title of inspector because he spent most of his time rummaging around trying to find certain packages of shag tobacco which had suddenly and without any ceremony whatever disappeared.

I print in full the recipe for cooking beans bushy style à la McLaurin:

Take one quart of beans and cover with cold water. Let them stand all day. At night strain half the water from the beans; add a cup of hot salt pork grease and a half cup of molasses or maple syrup. Tamp down a large chunk of checked salt pork for a centrepiece. Slam the iron lid on this picture and cover it up with hot sand and coals previously prepared in the camp fire. Let it cook all night. In the morning most of the moisture will have disappeared, each bean will be separate, the pork will be done to a crisp and the palate will be tickled beyond words.

Drawbacks of a Fixed Rule

While this recipe seems very simple it has its drawbacks. The inspector's batting average as a beaver was high, and only one set of bean castings made by him went hung from the very go-off. A colony of ants sneaked in at the soaking stage and a chunk of rancid pork showed up before the lid went on. When the lid came off a handful of ashes and grit did its distasteful work. The inspector did not notice these things, however. But Larry, who was a discriminating feeder, tumbled that something was wrong.

"What's the matter with these beans?" he snorted.

"I didn't notice anything," replied Packard, who hadn't yet tasted them. "It's news to me that anybody could ruin a bean anyhow!"

Larry spat something out in his left hand. "MacGowan, what does that look like to you?"

"Mica," said Mac, tossing a piece out of his own plate. "But I don't think it is very high grade."

Larry threw his beans over his left shoulder for luck. They rattled down a boulder behind him and fell into the lake like individual buckshot.

Personally I prefer canned beans to any other form of bean now known to science.

That night the inspector, upon whose stomach something lay rather heavily, set up at the camp fire and had Larry read to him from an old issue of "The Montreal Star" and a battered copy of "One Thousand and One Anecdotes," by the late Alfred H. Miles. Larry dug it up in a deserted cabin on Whiteleaf Lake. He had reason before dawn to regret having captured so rare and monotonous a volume. I heard him mumbling his lines as I turned over about midnight for the second lap. Nothing is more magnificent than the mutual suffering of those who are dividing misery.

And thus we tore the coupons from our dividend of liberty. There was much criticism, but no unhappiness; many hours of fatigue, but none of pain.

A Census of Six Lakes

We covered from our camp six lakes in all: Barnes, where we took our four and five pound speckled trout; McGregor, Grand, Green, McArthur, and Wakefield. It is impossible to go five miles in that country without encountering water.

The scenery is perfectly wonderful, although the mountains are not high. They were once, but ages have worn the Laurentians down, and they now lie tired upon the face of the earth, sprawled like wrinkled old men asleep. There is not a peak in the range. All projections have been rounded and smoothed by the batteries of heaven. It is an ideal and beautiful place, and Grand Lake, in my opinion, stands supreme as a bass water.

If I have left anything unsaid about this incomparable corner of Canada, it is due to a lack of space. It is quite impossible to condense into a few columns all that a trip of this sort awakens in one.

The two things I remember most distinctly are the cast where I first landed three at a crack, and the afternoon I had Larry goodby at the foot of Lake McGregor.

"Do you, by any accident, know a man in New York named Andrew Bridgeman?"

"Sure I know him, Larry. He's a member of the Dunwoode County Club. Many a time I have pounded the white pill with Andrew."

"Is he a smart guy?"

"Very smart—oh, very."

"Good business head?"

"If he lives long enough he'll have Rockefeller backed off the boards."

"You don't mean it! He's got sense, has he?" Larry scratched the pink fringe over his ear and batted his blue eyes.

"Lots of it."

"Well, he made an awful bad play up here."

"How so?"